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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3042  
INFO RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG PRIORITY 0215  
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3414

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DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S, CA/OCS/CI, AND CA/OCS/ACS, JOHANNESBURG FOR  
CONS  
LUOMA-OVERSTREET, RCO VEASY, AND USDHS MEEKER

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [CASC](#) [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LT](#)  
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: SUSPENSION OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS BY  
FOREIGNERS

REF: CA/OCS/CI-BROOKS 6/8/07 E-MAIL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A Ministry of Health and Social Welfare official acknowledged to Conoff that the GOL has suspended international adoptions in Lesotho, effective June 4, based on the Ministry's concern that certain Basotho children adopted by foreigners in unidentified countries "are being abused." Although a state-operated radio station referred to an apparent Cabinet decision to suspend such adoptions, the GOL has made no official announcement nor have officials offered more details or specified the duration of the suspension. According to the Ministry of Health official, a U.S. organization called "Americans for African Adoption" currently has four Lesotho adoptions in the pipeline. Post has not been approached by any adoption organization or prospective U.S. citizen adopters regarding the suspension or ongoing adoptions. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On June 8, the Director of Social Services at Lesotho's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) acknowledged to post's consular officer that the GOL had suspended international adoptions, effective as of early June. The duration of the suspension, however, is unknown. According to local sources, during the week of June 4-8 a state-operated radio station broadcast a brief reference to the adoption suspension during a daily morning talk show that announces resolutions made by the GOL Cabinet. The radio report offered no further information and the GOL has made no official announcement of the suspension.

¶3. (U) A follow-up conversation on June 8 with the Department of Social Services official revealed that all foreign adoptions are suspended effective Monday, June 4 by order of the new Minister of Health and Social Welfare (Comment: The Minister made no mention of the suspension during an unrelated meeting on June 7 with the Embassy's HIV/AIDS team, led by Charge. End Comment).

¶4. (U) According to the MOHSW official contacted, the suspension is based on the Ministry's concerns that certain children adopted by foreigners in unidentified countries "are being abused." The official also informed Conoff that a U.S. organization called "Americans for African Adoption" currently has four Lesotho adoptions in the pipeline and that the cases had been scheduled for court action (the final stage of the adoption process) prior to the suspension.

¶5. (SBU) On June 11, Emboffs obtained the unpublicized partial minutes of a GOL Cabinet meeting held o/a June 5 (STRICTLY PROTECT). According to the minutes, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Welfare was identified as the action officer for the adoption issue as follows:

Begin text: Adoption of Children in Lesotho. Cabinet directed that the Commission, which would investigate and recommend the

way forward with respect to the adoption of Basotho Children, should be established; and that the adoption of Basotho Children should be put in abeyance until further notice. End Text.

¶6. (U) According to ref inquiry, the U.S.-based organization "Adopt A Child" contacted the Department's Office of Children's Issues (CA/OCS/CI) with information that international adoptions in Lesotho have been suspended allegedly because of pending investigations based on report(s) that adopted children are being turned in to "sex slaves" in receiving countries. Although the MOHSW official stated to Conoff on June 8 GOL concerns over "abuse," she did not specify what form of abuse.

Comment

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¶7. (U) Although Lesotho's HIV/AIDS epidemic has produced nearly 200,000 orphans (defined as children having lost either one or both parents), domestic and international adoptions are relatively infrequent. According to GOL sources, only five international adoption cases were processed in May. Post has not processed any immigrant visa applications for adopted children over the past year (Note: Post does not issue immigrant visas. End Note). Prior to the MOHSW information claiming that four adoption cases are active, post was not familiar with any ongoing U.S. adoption cases in Lesotho or any adoption cases sponsored by "Americans for African Adoption." We will press MOHSW and other GOL authorities for more official information. Of note, the Cabinet minutes refer to the adoption of Basotho children, but does not specify international adoptions.

¶8. (U) Absent an official GOL statement on this issue, post recommends that CA limit any public mention to a brief, factual statement: "The Government of Lesotho has suspended adoptions indefinitely, effective June 4. Our Embassy in Lesotho is investigating for more details." End Comment.

MURPHY